FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS.

AN EASTER STORY.

BY EDITH SESSIONS TUPPER.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

BRIMSTONE GULCH awoke to the spring after a hard and vigorous winter. The camp had been cut off from the world for four long, dreary months. Even the stage route to Durango had been snowed under most of the time, though Nick Whitby, the driver, had managed to get through on an average of once a week.

The miners had huddled in their cheerless cabins and foregathered in Toby Brundage's saloon. Rusty Tom Dalton's old cracked fiddle had scraped and groaned for their entertainment, and once a month Sandy Pete had given a blow-out at his dancehouse.

In that narrow, gloomy gulch, shut round by the eternal ramparts of snow-covered mountains, they had managed to live—that was all.

"If a man has a hankerin' arter mining," said Musty Tom, the oracle of the camp, "he'd better go plumb ter hell and hev done with it. Leastwise, in hell ye kin hev a soft warm corner in winter, but in a camp ye kin freeze an' be damned."

There had been no excitement in the gulch since that memorable Christmas Day, when Montandon, the biggest dare-devil on the range, had found his wife and child and become reconciled to the former. He had gone back East with his family, but had faithfully promised the boys he would return in the spring.

"I'll come about Easter," he had said.

"Easter? When's that?" Musty Tom had growled; "that's another name for Decoration Day, ain't it?"

"Easter?" said Monte Jim, idly flipping the cards on the table before him, "Easter, you locoed old imbecile, is when our Lord rose from the dead."

Musty Tom turned and looked the gambler over from head to foot, coldly, calculatingly, contemptuously. "Your Lord!" he ejaculated. "Huh!" then spat with surprising accuracy in the depths of the glowing fire in Toby's saloon.

Now, as the first faint breath of Spring stirred the solemn pines in the canyon, as the ice melted on the mountains and the torrents came plunging into the valley, as here and there a violet peeped through the snow, the boys began to talk about the return of Montandon.

"Damned if I don't hug the scamp," said Musty Tom. "Thar never was a fellar in this here camp that I took sech a likin' to. He was the real thing. Handsome an' grand as a picter, 'fraid of nothin', dead shot, an' Lord! the way he could punish whisky. I wonder ef he'll bring his family along?"

"I hope he'll bring the little feller," said Toby, industriously polishing his array of glasses. "I never see no nicer, sweeter little chap in my life. An' the way he stood up thar the night Montandon found him a-wanderin' in the wilderness an' sung that thar Christmas hymn, why, I never neered nuthin' like it. He even made Jess Bowen cry an'——"

"Well, well," interrupted Monte Jim testily, "why shouldn't Jess Bowen cry if she wanted? Maybe if you were a dancehouse girl and a slave to such an infernal scoundrel as Sandy Pete you'd cry."

Toby came out from behind the counter and stood with his hands on his hips regarding Monte Jim seriously. "Thar hain't nuthin' the matter with ye, is thar, Jim?" he inquired solicitously. "Ye hain't feverish nor nuthin', are ye?"

"No, snapped Monte Jim. "There's nothing the matter with me, only that I grieve I am obliged to spend my entire life around a lot of blooming cattle," and snatching his broad-brimmed, slouch hat from its peg, the gambler walked moodily out of the saloon and up toward the trail leading along the rock-bound wall of the canyon.

Toby watched the tall figure until it was lost in the forest. Then, thoughtfully, and seriously ejaculating: "Well, I'll be damned!" returned to washing his bottles.

Monte Jim stalked gloomily along the trail. It wound on and above the canyon. Through the pines and cedars he caught glimpses of the valley below through which the swollen river rushed madly along. Something—what was it?—stirred in the soul of this man, with the face as impassive as the mountains about him. He recalled many scenes of his strange and varied life. The roaring of the river down there below the pines brought back the sound of the stream that ran under the windows of a farmhouse away in the Mowhawk Valley in York State. The agate eyes gleaming coldly under the flapping brim of his hat narrowed with reminiscences. Once he stopped, took off his hat and looked up to the gray sky. It could not be that Monte Jim thought of a prayer taught him long ago by his dead mother? Who shall say what emotions lurked behind that mask-like countenance?

After he had walked a mile or so Monte Jim had recovered his equanimity and sauntered back to the camp as coldly imperturbable and insolently defiant as ever.

As he came down the trail he suddenly paused. His ear had caught a strange noise. He listened. It was the sound of weeping.

Monte Jim hesitated a moment, then, turning quickly to the left of the path, entered the forest. A few steps brought him in sight of a figure seated on a fallen log. A woman, wrapped in a shabby old gray cloak, rimmed with tawdry fur, was sobbing bitterly, her face in her hands.

Monte Jim went forward and touched her on the shoulder. She started up and faced him. It was Jess Bowen, the dancehouse girl. Her face was discolored from weeping, and there was a deep purple bruise on her cheek. Her thin, wretchedly blondined hair was tangled and unkempt. Her hands were red from the cold. She was anything but prepossessing, and yet there was a forlorn pathos about the shrinking figure and bruised, tear-stained face that provoked sympathy.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Jim?" she said. "I thought for a second it was Pete."

"Did he give you that check?" asked Monte Jim.

The girl nodded, and then sinking down on the log, burst again into bitter sobs. "O, Jim," she cried, "I wish I were dead; if I had the courage I'd jump off into the river."

Monte Jim made no answer. He stood regarding Jess attentively.

"I'm sick of it all," she moaned, "sick of my horrible self, my horrible life. O, Jim, I don't know what it is, but something—maybe it's the spring and the soft air—something has stirred the decent part of me. I've been thinking, too, of old days—my old home—my mother"—her head sank upon her knees and she groaned aloud.

Something touched her lightly on the head—what was it? A kindly hand? There was a whisper—or was she dreaming?—"Poor girl!" it said.

She looked up. She was alone. Monte Jim had vanished as suddenly and completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Sandy Pete was storming and cursing about the dancehouse door, when a shadow fell between him and the cold spring sun. "Get out of my way, damn ye!" he snarled. The next instant he was lying flat on his back and a shining Derringer was thrust in his face. He screamed with terror.

"Be thankful I don't kill you, you cur!" said Monte Jim, quietly. "If you ever touch that girl, Jess, again, I will. Remember that!" Then he quietly pocketed his pistol and strolled away toward Toby's.

There was great excitement in that resort. Nick had just come in from Durango. He had seen Montandon there, who had sent word that he would be at the camp in a day or so. "He's got his wife and boy and a tall, handsome young lady—a number one—with him, and they're a-goin' to open up Jerry Vancouver's house up on the hill and stop here most all summer," announced Nick.

The excitement this bulletin aroused was only discounted by the arrival of the Montandons the following week.

Montandon's personality was so picturesque and magnetic and the story of his finding the young wife with whom he quarreled in his honeymoon on a ranch near Brimstone Gulch, so romantic, that every man, woman, child and dog in the camp turned out to welcome them.

Mrs. Montandon's beauty won the hearts of all, and the child whom his father had rescued wandering and lost in the wilderness and who had led him to the mother, completed the conquest of the hearts of the rough miners. Every man vied with his fellows to do something for the newcomers. So when a few days later the news flew through the camp that Mrs. Montandon had been to Sandy Pete and asked permission to have Easter services held in the dance hall, no one was surprised to hear that that reprobate had eagerly assented to her plan.

"I wish," Toby Brundage confided to a few of his cronies, "I wish she had come to me. If thet thar beautiful angel had asked me to split up the saloon into kindlinwood fer her kitchen stove, I should have licked right inter it an' you fellers would hev ben short fer pizen this spring."

"She's agoin' ter hev Miss Vancouver's piano toted down ter the mull," stated Musty Tom, "an' thet thar young lady who come along with 'em is agoin' ter sing hymns."

"Thet ain't all," said Nick, "she's sent up ter Denver fer a lot of roses an' what-not, an' they're agoin' to make thet thar cussed old sink of iniquity bloom like a damned flower pot."

Rumors such as these kept the interest of the camp at fever pitch, and when Easter Sunday finally dawned, every man in Brimstone Gulch washed his face, donned a clean shirt and hastened to Sandy Pete's dancehouse.

The rough wooden building was transformed. The walls were hidden with hemlock and pine boughs. Ropes of exergreens swung from the rafters. At one end of the long room a huge cross of roses and lilies was nailed high up against the wall. Just beneath it stood the piano, its top literally covered with sprays of large white waxen lilies.

The services were simple and brief. Montandon himself (wonder of wonders!) read a chapter from the Bible describing the resurrection. Mrs. Montandon played and her young friend and guest sang. The superb contralto voice rolled through the hall in a glorious melody.

"He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities," rang out the rich tones.

Miners, cowboys and ranchmen leaned eagerly forward to catch every word of that wondrous chant.

"The chastisement of our sins was upon him. By his stripes are we healed."

A big lump suddenly come in Monte Jim's throat. He pulled at his red neckerchief to give himself relief. As he did so, his glance fell upon Jess Bowen, whose eyes were riveted on the fair young singer. The girl was pale with suppressed emotion. Her eyes were brimming with unshed tears. As he looked, they overflowed and ran like rain down the thin face, haggard with suffering and stamped with dissipation. "For he was wounded for our sins," the voice soared heavenward jubilantly, triumphantly. "He was bruised for our iniquities. * * * By his stripes are we healed."

Suddenly the eyes of the gambler and those of the dancehouse girl met. For an instant the real man and the real woman looked out from their masks of flesh. Their spirits unconquerable, deathless, imperishable, silently communed. Their souls met. * * *

As the rare, sweet voice which had so strangely swayed that motley crowd throbbed away into silence, Mrs. Montandon beckoned her little son to her side, and filling his arms with the long sprays of sweet white lilies, bade him give a stalk to each one present. The child, looking like a little angel, ran hither and thither bestowing smiles and flowers upon all. Hands that had toiled at the pick, or lassoed the wild cattle on the plains, closed eagerly over the lilies, heavy with fragrance and symbolic of the most stupendous event in the world's history.

Monte Jim took his almost timidly and carefully wrapped his handkerchief about the stalk, lest the contact of his hand should wither the sensitive stem. Jess Bowen sobbed behind hers, and furtively kissed the waxen petals. It was long since the poor wreck of womanhood had touched anything so undefiled. * * *

At sunset Monte Jim climbed the trail again. He carried his spray of Easter lilies, still carefully wrapped in his handkerchief. The snow-clad mountains were changing in the after-glow to a roseate radiance. The air was balmy, and tinted of the warm, soft, drowsy summer days to come. The pines and cedars were whispering mysteriously to each other. The river sang far below in the depths of the canon.

Monte Jim found himself trying to hum the hymn he had heard that morning. He could not quite recall the music, but the words were burned in his soul. "For our transgressions," he said over and over to himself.

As he climbed upward, his face toward the heights, he came upon a woman sitting alone, her head upon her hand, her eyes downcast. At her feet lay a spray of withered lilies, soiled and earth stained, just as she had dropped them. It was Jess Bowen.

Monte Jim hesitated as he looked at the solitary figure with the wretched face and heavy, swollen eyes. Then suddenly an heroic resolve dominated and pervaded the man. He went to her, and taking her hand, drew her to her feet.

"Jessie!" he said.

The girl started violently. How many years had passed since any one had called her that. She stared at the gambler with almost frightened eyes.

"Jessie," he said again, "'et's you and I take a fresh deal. The game hasn't been a straight one for either of us, and luck's been dead against us. Now, what do you say? Suppose we take a clean pack and a fresh deal—take it together—Jessie."

"What do you mean, Jim?" the girl breathed, rather than spoke.

"I mean, Jessie, to ask you to quit your life and help me to quit mine. I mean to ask you to marry me."

The girl cried out sharply and buried her face in her hands.

"Jim, Jim," she panted, "what are you thinking of? You're wild. Think what I am. I'm not fit—I'm not fit."

"As for that, no more am I," said the gambler. "You're no worse than I am, I reckon, Jessie, that in the sight of God we're about equal."

The girl fell on her knees before him. She clung to his long, slim hands and kissed them in a frenzy of tears and gratitude. The gambler gently raised her from her abject position and drew her to his breast. * * *

They came down the trail together with solemn, peaceful faces, her hand upon his arm, his spray of fresh, unstained lilies pinned in her dress.

With a chivalrous and protecting air, Monte Jim escorted her straight to the door of Toby's saloon. Where all their little world was congregated, he led her.

"Boys," he said, quietly, "I want you all to know that I am going to marry Jessie to-morrow in Durango."

There was a silence like that of the grave for an instant, broken by a burst of harsh, ribald laughter from Sandy Pete.

"Marry!" he screamed. "Why you——"

But he got no further, for Montandon, the big, magnificent fellow, with one dexterous sweep of his hand, slapped him full on the mouth. Then, as the dancehouse-keeper slunk away like a whipped dog, the rich young ranchman went forward and took Monte Jim's hand.

"Jim," he said, heartily, "let me congratulate you. And you, too, Miss Bowen."

The girl trembled and shrank as he extended his hand, but he took hers and pressed it cordially.

"And now," he said, raising his voice so that every gaping, staring member of the crowd could hear him, "I want you boys to come up to my house with me. I want you to know my wife and child."

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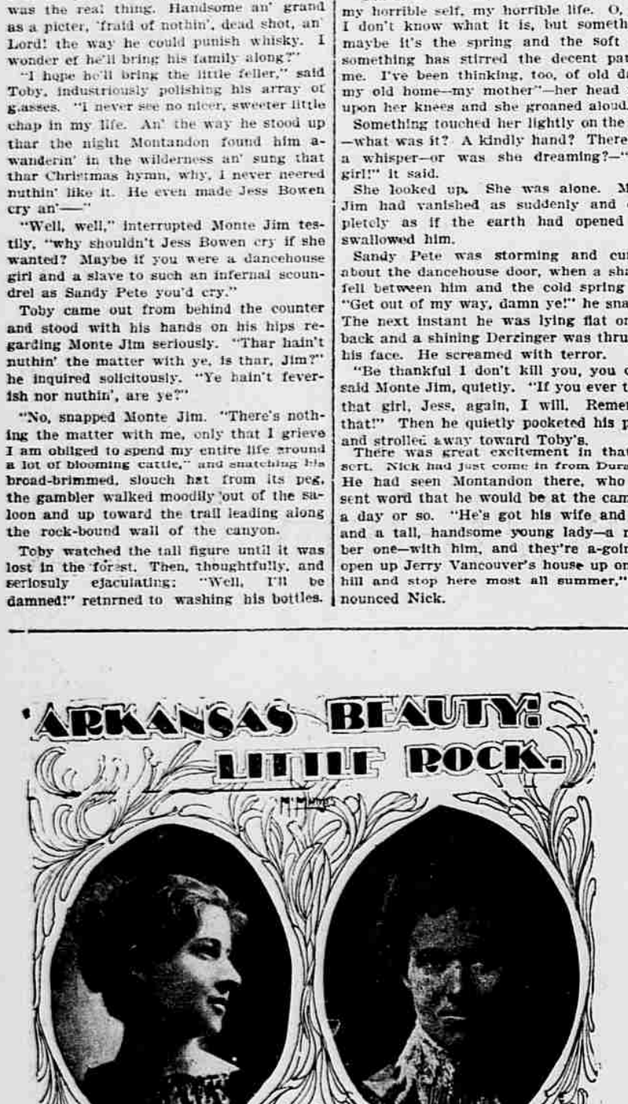
"JIM," HE SAID, HEARTILY, LET ME CONGRATULATE YOU AND YOU, TOO, MISS BOWEN."



In the Box Canon of the Gila.

"I think I only gave Boyd one order. 'Don't let him escape,' I said. I can remember how he smiled at me when he said he would not. It wasn't a pleasant smile, either, says Cyrus Townsend in Harper's Magazine.

"Well, we got back late in the afternoon, and found everything safe at the spring. We thought we heard a couple of shots back in the canon after we left Boyd, but we were not sure. That evening Boyd and the other man came in—alone.

"'Where's the Apache?' I asked, sternly, as he reported to me.

"'He escaped, sir,' answered the Sergeant, calmly. He seemed strangely calm.

"'Escaped!' I cried.

"'Yes, sir,' he replied, looking hard at me. 'He won't trouble you again, sir,' he added, after a pause.

"'Oh,' I said; 'very well.'

"Boyd turned and walked away, and I learned afterward that he had given the Indian the other man's rifle, because he could not kill even a wounded Apache in cold blood, and at a distance of ten paces had exchanged shots with him. The Apache's bullet went wild, but Boyd's aim was truer. They left the Apache in the canon with the top of his head blown off. He had nothing to complain of. He had been shot like a gentleman—and by one. It was rank disobedience and everything else on Boyd's part."

"What did you do to him?" asked the Bishop.

"Nothing—nothing at all. I never reported it or mentioned the subject again. Boyd was a changed man from that hour. A few days after Lawton's command came along, and I let Boyd go with them, he begged so, and Lawton was willing. He loved men, and Boyd was a man. So that is the way he became a cavalryman. Not even Lawton himself pursued those Apaches with more prim determination and relentless energy than that Sergeant of infantry. He was in at the round-up with his new commander. That is the end of the story, gentlemen."

The General finally broke the silence.

"Well, Harmar," he said, "as you remarked, it was disobedience of orders and all that, and the man should have been court-martialed. Yes, certainly"——

There was another pause, while we waited, breathlessly.

"By the way, Mr. Price," he continued, turning to the Adjutant. "The death of Vance leaves his position vacant. Will you make out an order to-morrow morning appointing Sergeant Boyd Sergeant Major of the Twelfth Cavalry?"

The Bishop rose from his seat, stepped across the porch to the General, and solemnly wrung him by the hand.

YOUNG GEORGE PHILLIPS, CORN KING.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

George H. Phillips of Chicago, who not long ago won the title of "corn king," by his unusual operations on the Board of Trade, is the only man who has succeeded in gaining such royalty without traversing a path strewn with the wrecks of the fortunes of less successful men. It is his pride that, though he cleared hundreds of thousands of dollars by his deal in corn, he did not do so through the ruin of any man.

Mr. Phillips is a young man of individuality. The thirty-two years of his life have been spent in and about grain operations.

He watched one big firm try to corner corn and fail. He believed he saw the secret of their nonsuccess. Talks with his friends convinced them he was right, but this did not bring him the necessary capital.

Finally, he determined to do what he could with the money he had, and, if that did not prove sufficient, to interest some one who could give the necessary aid. He began operations quietly, and for some time no one grasped the meaning of his actions.

Then the larger operators looked for the cause of short conditions, and discovered Mr. Phillips. They went after him, and tried in every way possible to "run him out." Mr. Phillips did not run. Instead he induced an old friend with plenty of c to aid him, and eventually secured mand of almost unlimited capital.

As a result, he ran the operators had descended upon him, helped s dealers so they did not lose and force clique to pay him handsomely. Whe profits of the deal were counted, Mr. lips found himself $200,000 richer tha fore he started in to make a recor corn.

GEORGE H. PHILLIPS.